IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Currently Amended) A method of payment for equipment usage, the method comprising:

establishing a minimum commitment for equipment usage per time period; and

exchanging payments for the equipment usage per time period based on ~~a greater one of~~ an aggregated usage whose value is at least as great as the greater of cumulative equipment usage and cumulative minimum commitments.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein exchanging payments comprises:

multiplying said equipment usage by a price per unit of usage to obtain a usage payment;

determining a first difference between the cumulative minimum commitments and the aggregated usage when the aggregated usage is less than the cumulative minimum commitments;

adding to the usage payment an amount determined by multiplying said first difference by the price per unit of usage; and

updating the aggregated usage to include the first difference.

3. (Original) The method of claim 2, wherein establishing the minimum commitment comprises:

identifying costs for the equipment; and

identifying the price per unit of usage based on the costs of the equipment.

4. (Original) The method of claim 3, wherein the costs are based on at least one of an acquisition cost of the equipment, services to be provided, and supplies to be provided.

5. (Original) The method of claim 4, wherein the costs are further based on at least one of an expected value of the equipment after a predetermined number of time periods, remarketing costs, a time value of money, profit margins, and risk of loss.

6. (Original) The method of claim 2, wherein exchanging payments comprises:

determining a second difference between the aggregated usage and a cumulative usage when the aggregated usage is at least equal to the cumulative minimum commitment and the cumulative usage is less than the aggregated usage;

subtracting from the usage payment an amount determined by multiplying a lesser one of the first difference and the second difference by the price per unit of usage; and

updating the aggregated usage by subtracting the lesser one.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

identifying a number of time periods as a term for the usage of the equipment; and

identifying a total commitment for the term of usage as a sum of the minimum commitments for the time periods of the term, wherein exchanging payments is limited by the total commitment.

8. (Original) The method of claim 7, further comprising exchanging a payment to purchase the equipment when a total of payments exceeds the total commitment multiplied by a price per unit of usage.

9. (Original) The method of claim 7, further comprising:

determining a price per unit of usage based on continued usage of the equipment beyond the total commitment;

increasing the total commitment when the aggregated usage exceeds the total commitment; and

exchanging payments for continued usage based on the continued usage multiplied by the price per unit of usage.

10. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising setting the minimum commitment for at least one time period at a start of the equipment usage to a lesser amount than the minimum commitment for other time periods.

11. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising increasing the minimum commitment to obtain upgrades for the equipment.

12. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

remarketing the equipment to obtain new equipment; and

changing the minimum commitment based on a difference between a market value and a value realized by the remarketing.

13. (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein changing the minimum commitment comprises exchanging a payment based on the difference.

14. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the equipment comprises multiple pieces of equipment, the method further comprising combining usage for the multiple pieces of equipment to obtain the equipment usage per time period.

15. (Original) A method of payment for equipment usage, the method comprising:

establishing a minimum commitment for equipment usage per time period based on multiplying a minimum number of units of usage per time period by a price per unit of usage;

multiplying an aggregated usage by the price per unit of usage to obtain a first payment;

exchanging payments for the equipment usage per time period based on subtracting a total of previous payments from a greater one of the first payment and cumulative minimum commitments; and

updating the aggregated usage to reflect the cumulative minimum commitments when the cumulative minimum commitments exceed the first payment.

16. (Original) The method of claim 15, wherein exchanging payments further comprises:

determining a first difference based on subtracting the cumulative minimum commitments from the first payment when the first payment is greater than the cumulative minimum commitments;

determining a second difference based on multiplying a result of subtracting cumulative usage from the aggregated usage by the price per unit of usage when the cumulative usage is less than the aggregated usage;

subtracting from the first payment an amount equal to multiplying a lesser one of the first difference and the second difference by the price per unit of usage; and

updating the aggregated usage by subtracting the lesser one from the aggregated usage.

17. (Currently Amended): A computer-readable medium as defined in claim 52 wherein: ~~program tangibly stored on a computer-readable medium and operable to cause a computer to enable structuring a requirements contract for equipment usage, the computer program comprising instructions to:~~

~~establish a price per unit of usage;~~

~~establish a minimum number of units of usage per time period;~~

~~track usage of the equipment per time period;~~

~~obtain payments per time period based on~~

A) the quantity p_i is the payment for equipment usage during the ith time period; and

B) the instructions direct the computer system to calculate the quantity p_i by employing operations that include:

i) multiplying ~~a credited number of units of usage~~ by a price per unit of usage a pre-update aggregate usage $A_{i-1} + u_i$ and subtracting a total of previous payments, wherein cumulative payments $\sum_{j=1}^{i} p_j$ ~~for a number of time periods~~ are at least equal to an amount determined by multiplying ~~a total of the minimum number of units of usage over the number of time periods~~the cumulative commitment by the price per unit of usage; and

ii) ~~update~~ updating the ~~credited~~ pre-update aggregated usage to obtain a value for the updated aggregated usage A_i that reflects the cumulative payments when the ~~total of the minimum number of units of usage~~

~~over the number of time periods~~cumulative commitment exceeds the ~~pre-update aggregated credited~~ usage.

18. (Currently Amended): ~~The~~ A computer-readable medium ~~as defined in program of~~ claim 17 ~~wherein the , further comprising~~ instructions direct the computer system to:

subtract a credit from the payments for the equipment usage for a time period when the ~~credited~~ pre-update aggregated usage is greater than the ~~total of the minimum number of units through the time period~~cumulative commitment, and greater than cumulative actual usage through the time period; and

update the pre-update aggregated ~~credited~~ usage to obtain a value for the updated aggregate usage that reflects the credit.

19. (Currently Amended): ~~The~~ A computer-readable medium as defined in ~~program of~~ claim 18, wherein the instructions to subtract the credit further comprise instructions to:

determine a first difference between the ~~credited~~ pre-update aggregate usage and the cumulative actual usage;

determine a second difference between the pre-update aggregate ~~credited~~ usage and the ~~total of the minimum number of units~~cumulative commitment; and

determine the credit by multiplying the price per unit of usage by a lesser one of the first difference and the second difference.

20. (Currently Amended): A computer-readable medium as defined in~~The computer program of~~ claim 17, wherein the instructions to establish a price per unit of usage further comprise instructions to establish the costs based on at least one of an acquisition cost of the equipment, services to be provided, and supplies to be provided.

21. (Currently Amended): A computer-readable medium as defined in ~~The computer program of claim~~ 20, wherein the instructions to establish a price per unit of usage further comprise instructions to establish the costs based on at least one of an expected value of the equipment after a predetermined number of time periods, expected remarketing costs, a time value of money, profit margins, and risk of loss.

22. (Currently Amended): A computer-readable medium as defined in ~~The computer program of~~ claim 17, further ~~comprising~~ containing instructions to:

identify a number N of time periods as a term for the usage of the equipment;

identify a total commitment for the term of usage as ~~a sum of the minimum number of units of usage~~the cumulative commitment C_N for the time periods of the term; and

limit the payments obtained to the total commitment multiplied by the price per unit of usage.

23. (Currently Amended): A computer-readable medium as defined in ~~The computer program of~~ claim 22, further ~~comprising~~ containing instructions to obtain a payment to purchase the equipment when a total of payments exceeds the total commitment multiplied by the price per unit of usage.

24. (Currently Amended): A computer-readable medium as defined in ~~The computer program of~~ claim 22, further comprising instructions to:

determine a price per unit of usage based on continued usage of the equipment beyond the total commitment; and

obtain payments for continued usage based on the continued usage multiplied by the price per unit of usage.

25. (Currently Amended): A computer-readable medium as defined in ~~The computer program of~~ claim 17 wherein:

A) $C_t = \sum_{j=1}^{t} c_j$, where c_j is an incremental commitment for the jth time period; and

B) the computer-readable medium, ~~further comprising~~ contains instructions to set the ~~minimum number of units of usage~~ incremental commitment for at least one time period at a start of the equipment usage to a lesser amount than the ~~minimum number of units of usage~~ incremental commitments for other time periods.

26. (Currently Amended): A computer-readable medium as defined in ~~The computer program of~~ claim 17, further ~~comprising~~ containing instructions to:

increase the minimum number of units of usage; and

obtain upgrades for the equipment based on the increase.

27. (Currently Amended): A computer-readable medium as defined in ~~The computer program of~~ claim 17, further comprising instructions to:

remarket the equipment to obtain new equipment; and

adjust the payments based on a difference between a market value and a value realized by the remarket.

28. (Currently Amended): A computer-readable medium as defined in ~~The computer program of~~ claim 17, wherein the equipment comprises multiple pieces of equipment and wherein the instructions to ~~track usage further comprise instructions to~~obtain the value of actual usage direct the computer system to combine usage for the multiple pieces of equipment.

29. (Original) A method of leasing equipment, comprising:

establishing a price per unit of equipment usage;

establishing a minimum number of units of equipment usage per time period; and

exchanging payments per time period based on multiplying a credited number of units of usage by the price per unit of equipment usage and subtracting a total of previous payments, wherein cumulative payments for a number of time periods are at least equal to an amount determined by multiplying a total of the minimum number of units of equipment usage over the number of time periods by the price per unit of equipment usage; and

updating the credited usage to reflect the cumulative payments when the total of the minimum number of units of equipment usage over the number of time periods exceeds the credited usage.

30. (Original) A method of leasing equipment for a specified number of time periods, comprising:

providing the equipment for use;

identifying a value of the equipment;

identifying a price per unit of usage based on the value of the equipment;

establishing a cumulative minimum number of units of usage per each of the time periods;

tracking usage of the equipment for each time period and adding the usage to previous usage to obtain total usage;

obtaining payments for usage of the equipment per time period based on multiplying a greater one of the total usage and the cumulative minimum number by the price per unit of usage and subtracting a total of previous payments; and

updating the total usage to reflect the cumulative minimum number when the cumulative minimum number is greater than the total usage.

31. (Original) A method of depreciating equipment, comprising:

establishing a minimum commitment for usage of the equipment per time period;

establishing a price per unit of usage;

determining a greater one of cumulative usage and cumulative minimum commitment for a time period;

multiplying the greater one by the price per unit of usage and subtracting a total of previous depreciation to obtain a depreciation expense for the time period;

incurring the depreciation expense; and

updating the cumulative usage to reflect the cumulative minimum commitment when the cumulative minimum commitment is greater than the cumulative usage.

32. (Currently Amended) A ~~computer program tangibly stored on a~~ computer-readable medium as defined in claim 52 wherein the quantity p_i is the payment for equipment usage during the ith time period, and the instructions direct the computer system ~~and operable to cause a computer to enable~~ depreciation of equipment, ~~the computer program comprising instructions~~ to:

~~establish a minimum commitment for usage of the equipment per time period;~~

establish a price per unit of usage;

determine a greater one of a pre-update ~~credited~~ aggregated usage $A_{i-1} + u_i$ and the cumulative ~~minimum~~ commitment ~~for a time period~~ C_i;

multiply the greater one by the price per unit of usage and subtract a total of previous depreciation to obtain a depreciation expense for the time period;

~~incur the depreciation expense;~~ and

update the ~~credited~~ pre-update aggregated usage to obtain an updated aggregated usage that reflects the cumulative minimum commitment when the cumulative minimum commitment is greater than the pre-update aggregated ~~credited~~ usage.

33. (Currently Amended): A computer-readable medium as defined in ~~The computer program of~~ claim 32, wherein the instructions to establish a price per unit of usage comprise instructions to adjust the price per unit of usage when a predetermined threshold amount of usage is exceeded.

34. (Currently Amended): A computer-readable medium as defined in ~~The computer program of~~ claim 32, wherein the instructions to establish a price per unit of usage comprise instructions to:

identify costs of the equipment; and

determine the price per unit of usage based on the costs of the equipment.

35. (Currently Amended): A computer-readable medium as defined in ~~The computer program of~~ claim 34, wherein the instructions to identify costs of the equipment comprise instructions to determine the costs based on at least one of an acquisition cost of the equipment, services to be provided, and supplies to be provided.

36. (Currently Amended): A computer-readable medium as defined in ~~The computer program of claim~~ 35, wherein the instructions to identify costs of the equipment further comprise instructions to determine costs based on at least one of an expected value of the

equipment after a predetermined number of time periods, remarketing costs, a time value of money, profit margins, and risk of loss.

37. (Currently Amended): A computer-readable medium as defined in ~~The computer program of~~ claim 32, ~~further comprising~~wherein the instructions direct the computer system to:

identify a number of time periods N as a term for the usage of the equipment; and

limit the depreciation expense to a total commitment equal to the cumulative commitment C_N ~~a sum of the minimum commitments~~ for the time periods of the term multiplied by the price per unit of usage.

38. (Currently Amended): A computer-readable medium as defined in~~The computer program of~~ claim 37, ~~further comprising~~wherein the instructions ~~to purchase~~direct that the equipment be purchased when the ~~credited~~ updated aggregated usage exceeds ~~the sum of the minimum commitments~~C_N.

39. (Currently Amended): A computer-readable medium as defined in ~~The computer program of~~ claim 37, further comprising instructions to:

determine a price per unit of usage based on continued usage of the equipment beyond ~~the sum of the minimum commitments~~ the total commitment ; and

incur additional depreciation expense for the continued usage based on the continued usage multiplied by the price per unit of usage.

40. (Currently Amended): A computer-readable medium as defined in ~~The computer program of~~ claim 32, ~~further~~ wherein:

A) $C_i = \sum_{j=1}^{i} c_j$, where c_j is an incremental commitment for the jth time period; and

B) the computer-readable medium contains ~~comprising~~ instructions to set the ~~minimum~~ incremental commitment for at least one time period at a start of

the equipment usage to a lesser amount than the ~~minimum~~ incremental commitment for other time periods.

41. (Currently Amended): A computer-readable medium as defined in ~~The computer program of~~ claim 32, further comprising instructions to:

increase the ~~minimum number of units of usage~~cumulative commitments C_i; and

obtain upgrades for the equipment based on the increase.

42. (Currently Amended): A computer-readable medium as defined in ~~The computer program of~~ claim 32 wherein the~~, further comprising~~ instructions direct the computer system to:

remarket the equipment to obtain new equipment; and

adjust the depreciation expense based on a difference between a market value and a value realized by the remarket.

43. (Currently Amended): A computer-readable medium as defined in ~~The computer program of~~ claim 32, wherein the instructions to incur the depreciation expense further comprise instructions to:

subtract a credit from the depreciation expense for a time period when the pre-update aggregated ~~credited~~ usage is greater than the ~~total of the minimum number of units~~cumulative commitment through the time period, and greater than cumulative usage through the time period; and

update the pre-update aggregated ~~credited~~ usage obtain an updated aggregated usage that to reflects the credit.

44. (Currently Amended): A computer-readable medium as defined in ~~The computer program of~~ claim 32, wherein the equipment comprises multiple pieces of equipment, the ~~computer program further comprising~~ instructions further directing the computer system to:

track usage per time period for each one of the multiple pieces of equipment; and

combine the usages per time period for the multiple pieces of equipment to obtain the ~~credited~~ actual usage.

45. (New) For specifying at least one of payments for and depreciation of equipment, a method comprising:

A) obtaining cumulative commitments C_j to usage of the equipment for successive time periods $j = 1, 2, \ldots$; and

B) employing a computer system to, for each given, ith time period of a plurality of the time periods:

i) obtain the value u_j of actual usage of the equipment;

ii) calculate therefrom a quantity p_i based on a usage value equal to the difference $A_i - A_{i-1}$ between an updated aggregated usage A_i for the given time period and an updated aggregated usage A_{i-1} for the previous time period, where the updated aggregated value A_k for any, kth time period is at least as great as the greater of the kth time period's cumulative commitment C_k and the kth period's cumulative actual usage $U_k = \sum_{j=1}^{k} u_j$; and

iii) provide an output that specifies the quantity thus calculated as at least one of the payment and the depreciation for the given time period.

46. (New) A method as defined in claim 45 wherein A_k is the greater of:

A) the kth time period's cumulative commitment C_k and

B) the sum of the kth time period's actual usage u_k and the previous time period's updated aggregated usage A_{k-1}.

47. (New) A method as defined in claim 46 wherein the quantity p_i calculated for the given, ith time period equals the product $r_i \cdot (A_i - A_{i-1})$ of a price r_i per unit of usage and the difference $A_i - A_{i-1}$ between the updated aggregated usages of the given and previous time periods.

48. (New) A method as defined in claim 47 further including at least one of incurring depreciation expense in the amount of p_i and making or receiving a payment in the amount of p_i.

49. (New) A method as defined in claim 45 wherein A_i is the greater of the ith time period's cumulative commitment C_i and the ith time period's cumulative actual usage $U_i = \sum_{j=1}^{i} u_j$.

50. (New) A method as defined in claim 49 wherein the quantity p_i calculated for the given, ith time period equals the product $r_i \cdot (A_i - A_{i-1})$ of a price r_i per unit of usage and the difference $A_i - A_{i-1}$ between the updated aggregated usages of the given and previous time periods.

51. (New) A method as defined in claim 50 further including at least one of incurring depreciation expense in the amount of p_i and making or receiving a payment in the amount of p_i.

52. (New) For enabling a computer system to specify at least one of payments for and depreciation of equipment for which cumulative commitments C_j of usage of the equipment have been made for successive time periods $j = 1, 2, \ldots$, a computer-readable medium containing instructions readable by the computer system to configure the computer system to, for each given, ith time period of a plurality of the time periods:

A) obtain values u_j of actual usage by the user;

B) calculate therefrom a quantity p_i based on a usage value equal to the difference $A_i - A_{i-1}$ between an updated aggregated usage A_i for the given time period and an updated aggregated usage A_{i-1} for the previous time period, where the updated aggregated value A_k for any, kth time period is at

least as great as the greater of the kth time period's cumulative commitment C_k and the kth period's cumulative actual usage $U_k = \sum_{j=1}^{k} u_j$;; and

C) provide an output that specifies the quantity thus calculated as at least one of the payment and the depreciation for the given time period.

53. (New) A computer-readable medium as defined in claim 52 wherein A_k is the greater of:

A) the kth time period's cumulative commitment C_k and

B) the sum of the kth time period's actual usage u_k and the previous time period's updated aggregated usage A_{k-1}.

54. (New) A computer-readable medium as defined in claim 53 wherein the quantity p_i calculated for the given, ith time period equals the product $r_i \cdot (A_i - A_{i-1})$ of a price r_i per unit of usage and the difference $A_i - A_{i-1}$ between the updated aggregated usages of the given and previous time periods.

55. (New) A computer-readable medium as defined in claim 52 wherein A_i is the greater of the ith time period's cumulative minimum commitment C_i and the ith time period's cumulative actual usage $U_i = \sum_{j=1}^{i} u_j$.

56. (New) A computer-readable medium as defined in claim 55 wherein the quantity p_i calculated for the given, ith time period equals the product $r_i \cdot (A_i - A_{i-1})$ of a price r_i per unit of usage and the difference $A_i - A_{i-1}$ between the updated aggregated usages of the given and previous time periods.

57. (New) For specifying at least one of payments for and depreciation of equipment for which cumulative commitments C_j of usage of the equipment have been made for successive

time periods $j = 1, 2, \ldots$, a computer system configured to, for each given, ith time period of a plurality of the time periods:

A) obtain values u_j of actual usage by the user;

B) calculate therefrom a quantity p_i based on a usage value equal to the difference $A_i - A_{i-1}$ between an updated aggregated usage A_i for the given time period and an updated aggregated usage A_{i-1} for the previous time period, where the updated aggregated value A_k for any, kth time period is at least as great as the greater of the kth time period's cumulative commitment C_k and the kth period's cumulative actual usage $U_k = \sum_{j=1}^{k} u_j$;; and

C) provide an output that specifies the quantity thus calculated as at least one of the payment and the depreciation for the given time period.

58. (New) A computer system as defined in claim 57 wherein"
A_k is the greater of:

A) the kth time period's cumulative commitment C_k and

B) the sum of the kth time period's actual usage u_k and the previous time period's updated aggregated usage A_{k-1}.

59. (New) A computer system as defined in claim 58 wherein the quantity p_i calculated for the given, ith time period equals the product $r_i \cdot (A_i - A_{i-1})$ of a price r_i per unit of usage and the difference $A_i - A_{i-1}$ between the updated aggregated usages of the given and previous time periods.

60. (New) A computer system as defined in claim 57 wherein A_i is the greater of the ith time period's cumulative minimum commitment C_i and the ith time period's cumulative actual usage $U_i = \sum_{j=1}^{i} u_j$.

61. (New) A computer system as defined in claim 60 wherein the quantity p_i calculated for the given, ith time period equals the product $r_i \cdot (A_i - A_{i-1})$ of a price r_i per unit of usage and the difference $A_i - A_{i-1}$ between the updated aggregated usages of the given and previous time periods.